

Contributions

BIBLE PORTRAITS—Ham, Shem, Japheth.

B. C. MOOMAW

After Noah, Abraham was the next great personage in the Bible history; but in order to maintain the historical thread of our series, and in order better to understand the character and mission of Abraham, it is necessary for us to attend briefly to the tribal development, both in its political and moral aspects, which marked the first centuries subsequent to the flood. Noah's three sons do not figure largely in primitive history other than so many genealogical sources, destitute for the most part of that pronounced religious character which distinguished their father. There was however a difference in character between the three, in which Ham suffers by comparison, his irreverent and perhaps rebellious conduct toward his father bringing upon him, or at least upon his posterity, the patriarchal curse of servitude. "Caanan should be a servant of servants unto his brethren." And then with the second and third emphasis he should be the servant of Shem, and he should be the servant of Japheth, a prophecy which is all the more remarkable that it appears to have had so exact a fulfillment in the history of that proscribed race. For the thousands of years which have elapsed since that primitive day the descendants of Ham have groaned under a servitude to the descendants of Shem and Japheth, a bondage which only in recent times, in the years within the memory of this generation, has been largely terminated by the recent but rapid maturity of our Christian civilization. In our own times, and doubtless throughout all the ages of oppression and misery, the Noachic curse, or prediction, in whichever light we may regard it, was made the supreme moral justification of slavery, an exceedingly remote inference which appears to have been particularly clear to that discerning spiritual vision which was unable to comprehend the philanthropy and brotherhood of the New Testament dispensation. Prejudice and self interest are extremely edifying and fertile inventors of scriptural dogma, yet in whatever light we may choose to regard it, the influence upon our own times and upon our modern civilization of that family misunderstanding away back under the warning shadow of the old ark is not only a matter of astonishment but of conviction that behind all human history is a determining hand which, tho our dull understanding may not be able to discern it in the ordinary events occurring around us, will nevertheless be as manifest in the sequel as in the origin of all things.

There are at least several reasonable

indications that Ham rebelled against the patriarchal authority, so binding in those days, and particularly against the decree of personal servitude and Shemitic lordship involved in the curse of his father. Far toward the source of these family rivulets of history we observe the Hamitic stream separating itself from the others, and forming the first distinct social and political organization, becoming isolated in tribal tradition and prejudice, animated doubtless by the determination to maintain a distinct independence despite the terms of the famous curse. They would defeat the decree of servitude. In separateness and in national power they would defy the encroachments of Shem and Japheth, and in the genealogy of this family hate and tribal purpose arose Nimrod, the first warrior, ruler, conqueror and nation builder. The subdiluvian hero, who "began to be a mighty one in the earth," and "a mighty hunter before the Lord," founded his kingdom in the great Euphratean valley and builded Babylon, and particularly the tower of Babel, the design of which was doubtless a national rallying point, a pledge of union and separate political existence, having its inception in a rebellion both against the decree of subjection, and against God, who was more or less clearly recognized as the determining force behind that decree. Tradition tells us how Nimrod himself audaciously defied the divine judgement, impiously shooting at the sky with his arrows when it thundered, as if he thought to wage war against heaven. Soon the judgment came. Lightning destroyed his great tower, and an astonishing miracle confounded the language of the builders and put an end to the fierce Hamitic empire. They were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth, and the Shemites, speedily inundating the country, laid the foundations of the subsequent Chaldean empire, in which the remains of the Cushite population was incorporated as a subject race. Subsequent to this was another and still more notable subjugation of the Hamitic family by Shem, when Israel overran the Caananites, and made hewers of wood and drawers of water of all the dense populations which escaped the exterminating sword of Joshua.

But a peculiar revenge awaited the vanquished Hamites. The apostacy which they undoubtedly led against God inoculated their Shemitic masters, both in the first and second subjugation, bringing upon them that long train of disasters and divine judgments which even to this day have not been entirely suspended. Long before Abraham's day this apostacy had become general. The patriarchal authority and the spiritual influence of Noah, who lived until within two years of the birth of Abraham, was not able to stem the open re-

bellion of the family of Ham, and the secret tendency of the others also to depart from the knowledge of God, and set up instead a worship of nature speedily degenerating into the grossest Baalic idolatry. In the crisis of this moral lapse God called Abraham. As we have said, only two years elapsed between the death of Noah and the birth of Abraham. The old witness, he whose faith and faithfulness had carried him over the flood, was gone. A new witness must be provided, continuing indeed the covenant of obedience, but also beginning the genealogy of that new covenant, which in the better, the more effectual dispensation of atonement and regeneration through the power of the Holy Ghost, would in the end make a perfect human obedience possible and acceptable. In him should all the families of the earth be blessed, for in the salvation to be wrought out under the Abrahamic covenant, Sin, the germinal parent of the innumerable progeny of sins, should be finally eradicated from the human heart.

GRACE AND GRIT

C. H. WETHERBE

These words may appear to some people to be quite inharmonious to each other, but a little thought will show that in reality they ought to supplement one another. First of all, one needs to possess a good measure of divine grace, which means that one should be a truly saved person; and then, in the second place, one should have a large measure of what we call grit, which means a dogged determination to go ahead. If one have plenty of grace his grit will be quite likely to manifest itself in the right direction; he will persist in going ahead, whether the way be smooth or rough, light or dark. The following story is significant: "The first Baptist missionary sent to Klondike had to reach the shore by going hand over hand along a rope stretched from the boat to a tree. When the church was organized they selected a piece of land to build upon. In order to hold the title the missionary moved a bed and stove on the property and slept there. Three men, the next day, met him in the street, and one of them asked, 'Are you the parson?' When he learned that he was, the man went on to inquire, 'Is it true that you moved your bed and stove on to that land, so as to hold it for the church?' He was told that it was. 'Then here is ten dollars for you to build the church.' Said the second, 'Put me down for fifteen dollars, and here is your money.' The third said, 'I don't believe in religion, but I admire grit, and here is fifty dollars.' " That missionary, in that work, gave a good illustration of grace and grit. The grace of God gave him the motive for engaging in the work of saving men and